

The Contentious Politics of Socio-Political Engagement: The Transformation of the Tablighi Jamaat in London

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Abstract

The thesis examines the extent to which the Tablighi Jamaat (TJ) as an Islamic, theocratic and social movement has negotiated and adapted to the British context, especially London in the post 7/7 period. TJ is the largest Islamic movement in the world and is characterised as an isolationist, disengaged, salvation oriented, apolitical organisation. The London branch of TJ has ambitions to construct a headquarter mosque in London – a project facing opposition across a spectrum of British society, and brandished as the “mega mosque”. As a means of ensuring the success of their project, London TJ leaders have embarked on a process of socio-political engagement aiming to demonstrate that the movement has changed its modes of operation, and trying to curtail allegations of radicalisation, after reports of terrorists passing through TJ mosques. Extensive observation research and interviews with TJ leaders, grassroots members and others involved in the on going contestation of the project, explain the adoption of the new strategy from the perspective of an elite and instrumentally aware leadership. In essence how the new strategy has been justified and re-framed, making it acceptable to a wider audience. The Public Inquiry over Enforcement Action of TJ’s mosque in Newham allowed for both TJ and opponents to highlight wider issues surrounding TJ and its stance towards engagement and commitment to community cohesion. Engagement may have initially been a tick-box exercise for London TJ leaders, but interacting with the wider community has had a transformative effect. TJ Leaders in London have emerged as a practical minded, demonstrating adaptability to local contexts, ensuring the survival of the movement. The durability of this, given the conservative and revivalist nature of the movement, will be a test of time.

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Glossary

<i>Alim</i>	expert trained in the Islamic sciences
<i>Amal</i>	Action or effort
<i>Amir</i>	leader
<i>Bayan</i>	Islamic sermon
<i>Burkha</i>	a garment worn by some Muslim women - covers the body from head to foot
<i>Burkhini</i>	a garment worn by some Muslim women giving complete covering for the body; used when swimming
<i>Chillah</i>	period of 40 days, of particular significance in Sufism
<i>Dawah</i>	invitation, spreading of the faith
<i>Deen</i>	religion, Islam
<i>Dunya</i>	this world, worldliness
<i>Eid</i>	festival
<i>Fatiha</i>	first chapter of the Qur'an
<i>Fatwa</i>	legal opinion
<i>Fazail-E-Amal</i>	"Virtues of Good Deeds", collation of readings used by the TJ
<i>Hadith</i>	sayings or acts ascribed to the Prophet Mohammad
<i>Hajj</i>	the pilgrimage to Mecca
<i>Halal</i>	allowed/permitted
<i>Haq</i>	Truth
<i>Haram</i>	forbidden
<i>Hijra</i>	migration – usually referring to that of Mohammad from Mecca to Medina
<i>Ijtima</i>	congregational gathering, rally

<i>Iman</i>	faith
<i>Inshallah</i>	God willing
<i>Janaat</i>	heaven/paradise
<i>Jahanam</i>	hell
<i>Jahiliyyah</i>	a state of extreme ignorance and disbelief in God
<i>Jamaat</i>	group, community
<i>Jihad</i>	struggle
<i>Kalima</i>	Islamic creed of confession
<i>Madrassa</i>	Muslim school or centre of education, seminary
<i>Markaz</i>	Centre, large mosque
<i>Masjid</i>	a building designated for prayer, mosque
<i>Miswak</i>	tooth-stick, generally procured from trees
<i>Niqab</i>	a cloth which covers the face except the eyes
<i>Pir</i>	‘old person’, guide, teacher, Sufi master
<i>Purdah</i>	veil, lit. ‘curtain’
<i>Sahaba</i>	companions of Prophet Mohammad
<i>Salaf</i>	predecessors, first three generations of Muslims – the ‘pious ancestors’
<i>Salat</i>	prayer
<i>Shalwar Kaameez</i>	baggy trousers and shirt
<i>Shari’a</i>	Islamic law
<i>Shaykh</i>	Sufi spiritual preceptor
<i>Shaytan</i>	devil
<i>Shirk</i>	associationism, polytheism
<i>Shuddhi</i>	lit. ‘purification’; Hindu missionary movement

<i>Shura</i>	consultative committee
<i>Tabligh</i>	lit. 'to communicate'; Islamic missionary work
<i>Ulama</i>	plural of alim
<i>Ummah</i>	the entirety of community of Muslims believers
<i>Yakhim</i>	trust
<i>Zakat</i>	the poor-due, obligatory on all Muslims who can afford it

Abbreviations

BNP	British National Party
CPA	Christian Peoples Alliance
CPO	Compulsory Purchase Order
DCLG	Department for Communities and Local Government
GLA	Greater London Authority
HQ	Head Quarters
IHRC	Islamic Human Rights Commission
LBN	London Borough of Newham
LDA	London Development Authority
LTGDC	London Thames Gateway Development Corporation
MCB	Muslim Council of Britain
MINAB	Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board
MP	Member of Parliament
MPACUK	Muslim Public Affairs Committee United Kingdom
NC	Newham Concern
NRM(s)	New Religious Movement(s)
NSM(s)	New Social Movement(s)
ODA	Olympics Development Authority
ONS	Office for National Statistics
PM	Prime Minister
PPA	Planning Performance Agreement
PPS1	Planning Policy Statement 1
PR	Public Relations
SMO(s)	Social Movement Organisation(s)
SMT	Social Movement Theory
TJ	Tablighi Jamaat
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
WWII	World War II

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